



WARDEN STORIES

Off Duty?

By Mark Pollert



Warden Mark Pollert

Most game wardens like to hunt and fish on their days off. It's not unusual, however, to go from "off" to "on" when we witness one of our fellow participants abusing North Dakota's resources.

A couple of winters ago on a weekend day off, I was walking across a snow-covered field toward a large slough. Camouflaged in white, my plan was to sit down on the edge of the cattails and try calling in a coyote or fox.

During the walk, I heard what sounded like a snowmobile off in the distance.

When I reached the edge of the slough, I saw a coyote trotting along the other side, probably a half-mile away – not a bad omen for the first stop of the day. I sat down and began calling.

At first the coyote moved slowly in my direction, but it seemed concerned, perhaps by the distant buzz from the snowmobile that I could still hear as well. The coyote came to within about a quarter mile, stalled and then turned around and trotted away.

I don't usually give up that quickly so I continued to call. After a couple more minutes a different coyote broke onto the ice and headed in the same direction as the first coyote. I pleaded with that coyote as best I could, but it didn't seem to slow his movement and he was getting farther away.

After seeing that it wasn't going to stop, I took aim. I'm not the world's greatest crack shot, so I was sort of surprised when the coyote spun around a couple of times and went down on the ice.

As I was walking toward the coyote, I heard the snowmobile again, and looked up just in time to see it crest a small hill in the direction from which the coyote had come.

The coyote, apparently not dead, struggled to get up at the sound of the

machine. I heard the snowmobile accelerate and watched in disbelief as it sped toward my coyote.

I began running, waving my arms and hollering but the snowmobile driver never saw me. (Apparently snow camo works very well.)

I was within 100 yards and still the snowmobiler attempted to run over my coyote at least twice. Not succeeding, he left the area, apparently still without noticing me.

A couple of minutes after I dispatched the coyote, the snowmobile reappeared, this time with two people aboard. Still appalled by what had happened, I jumped up and down and waved my arms, trying to attract their attention. To my surprise the snowmobile drove up to me. The passenger was carrying a gun.

The driver stopped and asked if the coyote was mine. I told him it was and that I was trying to dispatch it just before he tried running it over. He said he hadn't tried to run it over and I promptly reminded him that I was watching the whole thing.

He then recanted and agreed he had tried to run it over, but only because it appeared injured. However, I knew there was no doubt he planned to run it over whether it was injured or not.

After a couple minutes of reading him the riot act, I told him I was a game warden and that he was in some real trouble. His jaw nearly fell off.

I told the passenger to wait there while the driver and I went back to my pickup, so I could take down the information I needed to make a case.

Thousands of North Dakotans enjoy snowmobiling and game wardens issue very few citations for chasing or harassing wildlife. Usually we get reports of this type of activity second hand, but every once in awhile we get lucky and observe it in person. And it doesn't matter whether we have the day off, or not.

Editor's note: The individual in this case was cited for chasing/harassing a furbearer with a snowmobile, a class B misdemeanor, and paid a \$250 fine. Since January 2003 when this event took place, a new schedule of fines is in place and a similar violation would warrant a higher fine.